

U.S. intel: Coronavirus not manmade, still studying Wuhan lab theory

UTAH

A conservation success story: Protecting Utah farmland, wildlife and Camp Williams

4-way partnership will save 400 acres from development

By Amy Joi O'Donoghue | @Amyjoi16 | Apr 28, 2020, 7:00am MDT



Jim Smith, owner of Grant Smith Farms, looks over his land in Eagle Mountain on Wednesday April 22, 2020. The Conservation Fund worked with the Utah Army National Guard and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to permanently protect 400 acres of the farm around Camp Williams to serve wildlife migration corridors and to prevent further encroachment by subdivisions. | Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News

SALT LAKE CITY — The tradition of farming, ranching and sport shooting will continue in perpetuity in a swath of roughly 400 acres of land adjacent to the Army National Guard's training site at Camp Williams, helping to ensure military readiness exercises won't come in conflict with encroaching development.

The conservation easement deal was announced last week by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which worked with Camp Williams, the Conservation Fund and landowner Jim Smith to protect the farmland and expand the buffer zone between Camp Williams and other potential development.

“It has been a challenge, but we finally made it to the finish line,” said Paul Raymond, manager and master planner of the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program at Camp Williams. “It is going to be very beneficial in helping to protect the training mission at Camp Williams.”

Encroaching development in the fast-growing Salt Lake and Utah counties has presented challenges for Camp Williams, with efforts over the years to permanently conserve more than 2,000 acres for a buffer zone to protect both public safety for residents and minimize conflict.

“This accomplishment is truly a win-win for military readiness, land conservation, community growth and more,” said Brig. Gen. Tyler B. Smith, assistant adjutant general for the Army’s Utah Joint Force Headquarters. “We’re thrilled by the success of the initiative.”



Brig. Gen. Tyler Smith, assistant adjutant general for the Army’s Utah Joint Force Headquarters, shoots trap with Jim Smith, owner of Grant Smith Farms, in Eagle Mountain on Wednesday April 22, 2020. The Conservation Fund worked with the Utah Army National Guard and the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service to permanently protect 400 acres of the farm

The effort took three years to craft through the efforts of the Conservation Fund and negotiations with the Jim Smith family, which has been farming the land since pioneers first arrived.

“We feel that this will be probably at some point one of the few green areas left in this entire valley. We have been here a long time and felt it would be good to pass it on to future generations,” Jim Smith said.

The area is a critical migration corridor for deer, is home to a herd of antelope and also supports a pheasant shooting club and a place for clay pigeon shooting, Smith explained.

“Few other places in the country have seen more advanced development than in Utah along the Wasatch Front, and finding a solution that accommodates that growth and still enables ongoing training at Camp Williams while protecting the surrounding environment is a great accomplishment,” said Mike Ford, southwest director at the Conservation Fund.

This latest easement, in fact, is the third worked out through the Smith family and the Conservation Fund, bringing the total protected acreage to more 600.

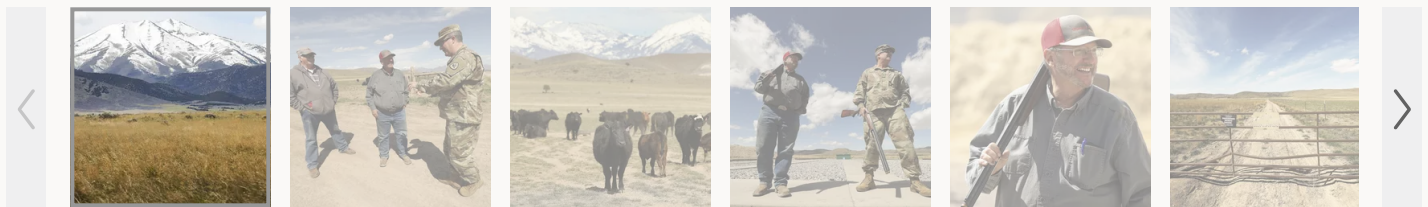
Raymond added that in this latest easement, the Conservation Fund had three teams working daily on the project.

“My hat goes off to those folks,” he said.



The snow covered Oquirrh Mountains tower above Grant Smith Farms in Eagle Mountain on Wednesday April 22, 2020. The Conservation Fund worked with the Utah Army National Guard and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to permanently protect 400 acres of the farm around Camp Williams to serve wildlife migration corridors and to prevent further encroachment by subdivisions. | Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News

1 of 8



Federal funding for the conservation effort came through the National Guard Bureau, the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program and the Natural Resources Conservation Easement program.

In this case, it was the first easement as part of Camp Williams' conservation efforts that received money from the Natural Resources Conservation Services.

Emily Fife, the agency's Utah state conservationist, said the effort shows that agricultural values, environmental benefits and military missions can go hand-in-hand.

Additional money also came from the Utah Legislature to establish the property, known as the GSF Farm Ground, as part of the "West Traverse Sentinel Landscape," a designation used for lands of high ecological and agricultural value that are near military installations. Officials involved in the federal partnership will also seek a federal designation.